



COMMITTEE STATEMENT

Opening Statement of Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Republican Leader
Committee on Education and Labor Hearing:
"Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Education"
May 26, 2022

(As prepared for delivery)

"There are no right words to describe the heartbreaking and horrific tragedy that happened at Robb Elementary School. I thank the Chairman for having a moment of silence at the beginning of this hearing.

"We as a nation are devastated by the loss of so many precious lives. My prayers are with the victims, their fellow students, families, colleagues, and the community of Uvalde, Texas.

"We must be thoughtful about how we discuss and handle school safety and mental health issues. Federal changes should not be made in haste, and there are still many details we do not know as the investigation continues.

"Mr. Chairman, as I've said before, we stand ready to work with you to examine the federal programs under our jurisdiction to help families, schools, and communities prevent these tragedies from occurring. And while we keep Uvalde in our prayers, we'll move forward with the business at hand today.

"Mr. Secretary, I wish this was going to be a hearing of great agreement and examples of our working together. Unfortunately, that isn't the case. The Biden administration has promised to enact unpopular and expensive mass student loan forgiveness by executive fiat, but anyone who looks at what the Department of Education has done over the past year can see that blanket student loan forgiveness is already well underway.

"First, the Education Department expanded the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program well beyond the narrow limits set by Congress. In a letter sent to you last October, I criticized the Department for turning this already expensive program into 'open-ended loan forgiveness' for millions of borrowers. But this isn't the only vehicle this administration has used to smuggle in mass student loan forgiveness.

"The Department also waived the requirements for income-driven repayment plans, canceling debt for ineligible borrowers under the guise of 'targeted forgiveness.' According to the Department, that means potentially wiping the student loan balances for more than 4 million borrowers, many of whom have incomes well beyond that of the individuals these programs were intended to help. The administration is right on one thing: these programs are broken. It's hard to justify to taxpayers that they should pour more money into a program forgiving nearly \$200 billion in loans for graduate students, or programs like PSLF which forgives an average of \$100,000 in forgiveness per borrower—a third of whom are making

well into six-figures. We need programs that protect borrowers and taxpayers, not unsustainable programs that will exacerbate the ballooning prices colleges and universities charge students.

“It was clear that student loan cancellation was on the horizon when President Biden took office. His continual extensions of the student loan repayment pause—which have already cost taxpayers over \$100 billion—were a signal that mass forgiveness was on the way. Never mind the fact that Biden’s skyrocketing inflation is disproportionately harming those who never went to college—the very same individuals expected to foot the bill for Biden’s loan forgiveness.

“Yet, President Biden insists on going even further and is reportedly moving towards blanket forgiveness to the tune of \$10,000 per borrower without Congressional authorization. Further, forgiving student loans to try and win back some voters while alienating the two thirds of Americans without baccalaureate degrees cuts directly against our shared goal of unifying the country.

“Moreover, what does loan forgiveness do for the millions of students taking out loans tomorrow? It doesn’t lower college costs, nor does it improve student outcomes. It simply exacerbates the problems of our higher education system, which is in desperate need of reform.

“And Mr. Secretary, I stand ready to work with you, the President, and my Democrat colleagues to fix it. Let’s tackle these issues and deliver meaningful, bipartisan reform that will lower college costs, ensure students graduate with affordable debt, and increase college completion so we can set students up for success.

“Mass student loan forgiveness is not the answer. It would break the federal government’s commitment to taxpayers that providing access to higher education will benefit every American by making those who took out loans a priority over those who did not go to college or those who paid for college without borrowing money. Indeed, the loan program provides millions of low and middle-income borrowers the opportunity to move up the income ladder, but instituting mass student loan forgiveness makes this program unsustainable. Surely last-minute political gambles are not worth undermining our ability to provide educational opportunities to those who otherwise would not have them.

“And unfortunately, my concerns with the Department of Education extend far beyond its higher education agenda. We’ve seen this administration disrespect parents. When the National School Boards Association insinuated parents were the problem, I was shocked that the Department of Justice issued a memo basically endorsing that view. And I was extremely disappointed your Department didn’t rally to stand up for parents. Schools should be in partnership with parents, not just trying to cast them aside.

“I also have concerns about your continued push to end—or limit as much as possible—school choice. From the D.C. Choice program to your charter school rule, you’ve favored teachers unions over families. And often over families desperate for an education that gives their child the opportunity to achieve lifelong success. Finally, I fear your coming rewrite of the regulations on Title IX will only exacerbate parents’ frustration and mistrust by ratifying a world view that denies basic science, treats parents as an obstacle, and seeks to undermine the very opportunities for girls that Title IX has helped protect and expand.

“Finally, conducting robust oversight and holding the executive branch accountable for how it spends taxpayer dollars and administers the law are critical for a functioning and strong government. Action without proper oversight and transparency leads to unlawful and careless actions. Unfortunately, your

agency has been unhelpful and downright obstructive at times. Mr. Secretary, we cannot tackle these issues successfully if we do not work together.”